

# THE Splatter TIMES

Summer 1983

"A decidedly unsavory publication"

No. 2



While this photo from *MIDNIGHT* should help set the mood for the new *Splatter Times*, it's also a reminder that our interview with director John

Russo can be found on page 6. (Photo courtesy of John Russo).

## More gore to come from H.G. Lewis?

By DONALD FARMER

*Splatter Times* Editor

Does Herschell Gordon Lewis really need an Introduction to *Splatter Times* readers?

I don't think so, especially now when his popularity appears at an all-time high—even 12 years after directing the last in a chain of low-budget gory films like *BLOOD FEAST*, *TWO THOUSAND MANIACS*, *COLOR ME BLOOD RED*, *A TASTE OF BLOOD*, *SOMETHING WEIRD*, *GRUESOME TWOSOME*, *SHE DEVILS ON WHEELS*, *JUST FOR THE HELL OF IT*, *THE WIZARD OF GORE*, *THE GORE GORE GIRLS*, and over 30 others that helped make a drive-in double bill the best ticket in town during the '60s and early '70s.

Yet despite his incredible output as a director, Lewis is also something of a household name to advertisers and copy writers across the country who follow his monthly column in *Direct Marketing* magazine. In fact, the following introduction which accompanies his column shows that Lewis has an very impressive list of credentials in this field:

"With his wife Margo, Herschell Gordon Lewis operates Communcomp, Fort Lauderdale, Florida. He specializes in writing direct mail packages and mail order ads and in creative consultation. He has written for American Bankers Insurance Group, New Horizons, the United States Historical Society, the American Rose Society, the International Museum, Fresno Trading Co., International Precious Metals Corp., Bing and Grondahl, National Health Products, American Collector Club, and many others.

Mr. Lewis is the author of *MORE THAN YOU EVER WANTED TO KNOW ABOUT MAIL ORDER ADVERTISING* and four other books on mass communications and is the "as told to..." author of the recently-published *SPIRIT OF AMERICA: NORMAN ROCKWELL*."

To explain his interest in Norman Rockwell, I should also point out that Lewis is also a nationally-recognized authority on painting and art collectibles—he and Margo even write for a national art magazine. And as if that weren't enough, Lewis is also a confirmed auto buff whose four cars include a Rolls Royce and a De Lorean!

I found out all this and more on June 30 when I visited Mr. Lewis at his South Florida home to conduct the following interview. Wearing shorts and looking tan and athletic, Mr. Lewis showed me around his beautifully decorated home (without a single *BLOOD FEAST* poster on the wall), then we settled down in his den as I flipped on the recorder: Herschell Gordon Lewis: I don't usually do these loose interviews, but I like the way you write. You seem to be a literate guy, which is very rare in this business.

Donald Farmer: Thank you. I've read in *Fangoria* about the *GORE FEAST* movie...

HGL: Yeah, I read that too.

DF: Is that a correct report?

HGL: Not really. I'll tell you the story of that. There's a fellow named Johnny Legend, and I had spoken to him on the telephone a couple of times. He works with this young chap—Jimmy Maslin in California who now has the rights to *BLOOD FEAST* and *TWO THOUSAND MANIACS*.

DF: Does he have those along with Eric Caldren?

HGL: As far as I know he is alone in that. His company is called *Epic International*.

DF: Yes, I'm familiar with that.

HGL: I have no idea what the ownership of that is.

DF: I spoke to Caldren and he said he was a co-owner and the company has a whole bunch of the rights.

HGL: Well, I didn't think they did. I talked to Maslin maybe once a week because we had conversations about making the movie, called *BLOOD FEAST II*, and one day Johnny Legend showed up here—we saw by the pool. It was a real hot day—and threw ideas around. And, apparently, he either has or is about to have some sort of arrangement where he makes films directly for television—which a lot of people are doing these days—and I said to him, "This type of picture—this genre—is not for TV unless it's for cable," and he said yeah, yeah, yeah. So he said, "If I make this thing are you interested in directing it?" And my answer was, is, and will be to a question like that—conditionally. Which is the only one word answer that fits it. The reason I put it that way is because... I lead a good life down here. I play tennis every day. I am not hurting for dollars. I'm not looking for the next job.

DF: You have a mail order company...

HGL: I am a mail order writer. I'll show you some evidence of that. And it's somewhat tamer than the film business, but on the other hand you're not always fighting with exhibitors and distributors to get your film rentals—it's just a different kind of life. I write a monthly column for *Direct Marketing* magazine. I have a book called *MORE*.

Continued on page 4

# Speaking of splatter

Dear Sir:

I've just received the first issue of *Splatter Times* and have found it in excellent publication, very interesting and informative. Films like these generally don't find their way to here appearing if at all in heavily censored versions. As a result, I can only obtain them by going or trading for them in no cassette format, and in no cassette, which describes and rates the films, is justly appreciated by me. Please keep up the good work. Yours sincerely, John M. Kellie, 829 Prince Arthur Blvd., Thunder Bay, Ont., Canada, P7C 3M7

Dear Donald,

The first issue was excellent, especially the interview with Joel Reed. I hope you keep covering the more obscure horror movies because those are the ones that I really enjoy, and there are two things I'd like to see in the *Splatter Times*. I'd like an article on 1 Split on Your Grave and an interview with Spinal's horror star Paul Naschy. Again, keep up the good work.

John M. Kellie  
148 Ohio St.

McKees Rock, Pa 15136

John - Some comments on Naschy on his film *CONTRA LA GRAN LUNA* can be found in the recently published *Demotique* nos. 4, it's available from Barry Kaufman, 1807 S. Halsted, Homewood, IL 60439 or 318 (including postage).

Dear Don:

Just got the *Splatter Times* and wanted to put you on the back. Yeah, it's great! It's such a good horror fanzine.

because so much of that stuff hits the year round drive-in circuit in our area. One of my special areas of study concerns a couple - June and Ron Ormond - who made of cheapo movies out of Nashville for 30 years. In the late sixties, they "saw the truth" and began making Christian fundamentalist horror movies for churches, which proved very successful. Know anything about them? (No, but the Tony and Susan Adams Christian Foundation of Nashville is a real-life horror story that'd make a good movie. It's our local version of one of those *Moussie* cabs, where teenagers are brainwashed to be slaves to the Alamo, who also operate a big elfing store for country stars and all the money goes to their religious cult. The Village Voice had an expose on them a few years back, and - though Susan's slave died of cancer - Tony is still running the show, about 30 years later. D.F.)

About Splatter Times, great to see you and it typifies, I've been trying to get Fear of Darkness done that way, but always ran out of money. Also good photo reproduction. My compliments to your printer.

Liked the articles - especially the interview with Joel Reed. Try to examine your backyard with great detail - regional horror films have been ignored. I may even find an article in FOD no. 6 a phenomenon. The Christmas Eve Drive-ins. In Columbus, Ohio known as "The Heavenly Bar-O PIT" movies (some of the Ormonds' later films played there).

Yours,  
Tim Mayer

Dear Mr. Farmer,

I have just received my off-

cial newspaper printing of the *Splatter Times* and I would like to compliment you on its highly polished and professional look. The variety of articles and illustrations that presents something for everyone. I hope this will continue to limit your coverage to the horror genre exclusively. No E.T., STAR WARS, GODZILLA, or other silly giant Japanese monsters here, please. (Don't worry - I wouldn't dream of wasting space on that stuff, D.F.) My favorite article was your review of *BORROR OF THE ZOMBIES*. What I would give for the opportunity to see this film. About 5 or 6 years ago I caught *TOMBS OF THE BLIND* under an alternate title *NIGHT OF THE BLIND* dead at my local drive-in and I have never been quite the same. Although the acting and dubbing were unimpressive, the depiction of the Knight Templars was so terrifyingly effective that this film got an immediate elevation to my top ten list of all time, and it hasn't lost its place yet! The eerie moon slow-motion ride of the Templars left an indelible impression on my warped mind, and isn't this what great horror films are all about?

My last favorite article was the write-up on *YODOROME* which read too much like the contents of a press kit. I had the feeling that I had read all of this somewhere before.

I wish you continued success with the *Splatter Times*, and enthusiastically look forward to your next issue. By the way, what is its anticipated frequency?

Frank Tocco  
1015 Colver Ave.  
Utica, New York 13502

Frank - I'm keeping the circus

pic's exotic which seems gathered after the old Universal movies. Money plays the black-copied County who has the tables turned on him by a village girl who's into blood-magic.

A video that's been good more to the usual alrpy is Greg Kihn's "Jeopardy." It's

John Waters wrote us to say he may be starting a new movie this fall - let's hope so. In the meantime, the film committee I'm on for the Coockville Drama Center has booked *POLYESTER* for the week of Halloween. It'll be on a double bill with Peter Cushing's *AND NOW THE SCREAMING STARTS*, so everyone is invited to come by if you're in the area.

On the West Coast, director Fred Olen Ray, who recently completed *SCALPS*, says he's working on a new one called *BIOHAZARD* that'll feature outer space monsters, plenty of pure effects, and lots more. We'll have a photo preview in *Splatter Times* no. 3, which'll be out around mid-October.

Our next issue will also feature a study of Spain's four-part *Blind Dead* trilogy - complete with lots of rare photos (including German lobby cards). Naturally, I've got several more surprises lined up for next time, but no sense in telling you 'everything' here - just be sure to subscribe so you won't miss out!

hello quarterly for now, but I hope it gets up there where I can afford to put \$57 out six times a year. I certainly have more than enough material - in fact, a special *Blind Dead* issue slated for this issue has been rescheduled for no. 3 because of a lack of room. Most of the space in this issue had to go to the interviews, which are too logistical for me to hold off on printing them (I'll call D.F.).

Dear Donald,

I have *Splatter Times* no. 1, a very professional and presentable layout offering an in-depth look into almost no ways presentable genre. The photographs are wonderful, and you are to be congratulated on your crisp layout and design. I also enjoy your unimposing and intelligent writing style. Perhaps best of all, you've managed to pack the issue with an amazing amount of information. I especially appreciate the reviews in *Video Vomit*.

Mostly Yours,  
Bertie Marks  
505 Elm Street S.E.  
Albuquerque, N.M.

Don,

Thanks for issue no. 1. Great magazine - with a lot of ground potential. I get the feeling that this could be the magazine writing for the horror fan by a fan. Your writing is clear, concise, and without the "judgemental" other magazines feel compelled to you know. Good luck with your endeavor.

Sincerely,  
Rick Wagner  
212 Parr Ave.  
Minneapolis, MN 55438

ures a little creepy because that's a neighborhood where Kihn sees his bride decompose at the "I do's" - then a teased something - other grabs him and she states it into his mouth. She starts singing all over him. There's lots more going on, but see for yourself.

SPLATTER SHORTS

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IN PRAISE OF QUADRIPLER FEATURES  
Millions of tourists head for Tennessee every summer to gawk at ENYA's mansion, hear the mostly unlistenable "music" of the Grand Ole Opry, and hike around the Smokey Mountains with their knee-deep lanterns and bag spray.

If only these people realized that the "real attraction" of any visit to Tennessee should be a stop at one of our finer drive-ins which often feature triple and sometimes quadruple horror bills during the spring and summer months. For instance, if the word had gotten out, I'm sure that gore-heads from New Jersey to Omaha would've bought round trip tickets and flown to Memphis a few months back to catch *BLOODTHIRSTY BUTCHERS*, *TORTURE DUNGEON*, *THE RATS ARE COMING*, *THE WEREWOLVES ARE HERE*, and *THE MAN WITH TWO HEADS*, on a big Milligan quadruple bill.

Of course, Nashville has its own share of all-night live-ups. The Colonial/Twin Drive-In had *CANNIBALS IN THE STREETS*, *THE UNSEEN*, *THE CHILDREN*, and *DON'T GO IN THE HOUSE* on just one of its screens not too long ago - then there was the night I mentioned last issue when I saw *HORROR OF THE ZOMBIES*, *THE SURREX OF THE MUTILATED* on one screen while *MIDNIGHT* and *BEYOND THE DARKNESS* played on the other. (At least I'd already seen *MIDNIGHT* at the Cinema South).

But let's leave the Colonial for now and go to Nashville's only other drive-in still keeping its gates open - the fabulous Skyway in DeKalb County (a predominantly black, predominantly sleazebait neighborhood). A couple of years back the Skyway teamed up *TOURIST TRAP*, *BLOODTHIRSTY BUTCHERS*, and *SIMON - KING OF THE WITCHES* for a memorable week's run, but June 10 marked the opening night of their first triple bill, some time *MAD GRASS MASSACRE*, *BLOOD WATERS OF DR. Z*, *FRANKENSTEIN ISLAND*, and *HATCHET MURDERS* (Darío Argento's *DEEP RED*).

I pulled in about 15 minutes before the show started but still had to settle on the fourth row back - warm weather and gore usually spell a heavy turnout. There was just enough time to grab a pizza as the first one started, even though it'd be about a half hour more till it got dark enough to see the picture clearly.

*MAD GRASS MASSACRE* began with no opening titles or anything, just a climatically filmed scene of some guy picking up a dead woman. It was long and boring, but things definitely perked up in the next scene where he brings one to his apartment, ties her nude and spread-eagled to an altar, and sacrifices her to some Mexican "gods of evil" where he wears this ritualistic mask that looks like a souped-up weaver's helmet.

Let me point out right now that I liked *MAD GRASS MASSACRE* a lot, even though the title had me expecting the worse. This is obviously a very, very cheaply made picture - almost certainly blown up from 16mm and cast with nonprofessionals - but it makes up for that with some enthusiastically perverse gore sequences and a campy masquerade who give the victims to be his best George Zucco star when he picks them up from one eccentric pimp after another (the best one acts like a warmed over beatnik and says everything in rhyme. As our masquerade plays him a couple of dances for one girl, the pimp says, "green makes the man sexy." When he says "sexy" as a screw, it's almost as good as going through a time warp to the days of *BUCKET OF BLOOD*).

Of course, it's a good thing *MAD GRASS MASSACRE* has its quirky characters and a good shot of gore, because the story line is so full of structural stupidity and holding back that it really boils down to a mad slasher killing books for 90 minutes. The first three victims are killed in almost identically staged but still pretty effective sequences where they're mutilated as a warmup to dismemberment. And despite the pic's cheap appearance, we see some first-rate make-up acts as a very realistic dramatic turn of each girl is sliced open lengthwise and a fistful of organs scooped out.

For the big climax, the masquerade is preparing to disembowel three nude, chained girls before the cops bust in and stop him. From this point on, *MGM* is hopelessly out of its mind. The cops bust in, the masquerade is a barbarian, and when the police fish his car out there's no one inside - just that customized weaver's mask.

It's a shame that *MAD GRASS MASSACRE* is saddled with such a clichéd wrap-up, but I still recommend it as a low budget oddity that's lots of fun and sadism dual. You

## Video Vomit

HORROR ROCK VIDEOS

Anyone glancing at the contents of this issue can tell there's no shortage of horror/gore films in the theaters these days. Incredibly interesting though, that some of today's most imaginative, visually exciting genre filmmaking is turning up in the form of those three to five minute rock videos which play on MTV - Music Television and on music programs across the

country.

My personal favorite of the moment is The Ramones "Psycho-therapy" video which, naturally, takes place in a mental ward. Interest with the singing are some effective shots of doctors who transform into rotting zombies, a frontal lobotomy operation, and lots of other surprises.

Eddie Money's video "I'm in Love" is art in a way

THE SPLATTER TIMES  
EDITOR/PUBLISHER  
DONALD FARMER

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# Stephen King goes South



Here's three of the many faces of Stephen King —



snapped during his June appearance at Knoxville's



Deep South Con. (Photos by Donald Farmer).

By DONALD FARMER

Since CARRIE jumped onto the bestseller charts in the '70s, Stephen King has emerged as the most successful author of horror fiction "ever" — earning the kind of royalties that Robert Bloch, Richard Matheson and others can only dream about. But financial success that surpasses virtually every other writer's (including Norman Mailer and the rest) leads to an obvious question — Is King's talent really in proportion to his pay checks?

Participating in a panel discussion last June at Knoxville's Deep South Con, King spoke on behalf of himself, Peter Straub, Whitley Streiber, Charles Grant, and other genre authors in attendance when he commented, "I think we sell well because we write well, and I think that's true in every genre. I think the people working in the genre care about it."

"I think largely because of Steve and partly because of me," Straub interjected, "There's a large receptivity to books that had not previously been commercially possible."

But as for whether King has gone so far as to "create" a new kind of horror genre with novels like CUJO, CHRISTINE, and FIRESTARTER, the author was decidedly more modest. "I think the whole idea I created anything is bullshit. Anyone who reads the books knows they're built on things that have come before — there's not an original idea in the bunch. They're ghost stories."

"We're still the baby boom," King noted, "and I think the reason my books are doing well — Peter's books — (is because) that market was there all along but nobody could afford it. And I don't think this Judith Krantz bullshit is going to go down a lot longer."



Peter Straub and Whitley Streiber pore over a book at last May's Kubla Khan Convention in Nashville. (Photo by Donald Farmer).

With the exception of DIFFERENT SEASONS, all of King's post-CARRIE novels have fallen in the general horror category, but he claims, "I certainly don't think about horror per se (when I write). The horror aspect isn't what sells a book for me. I don't pick up a Peter Straub (book) because I think somebody's head's going to come off."

"An audience member asked King for his idea of "the ultimate horror novel," and the author joked, "I think it's a panel discussion that goes on forever."

Later in the day, King was called on to say a few words during the convention's awards presentations. "Probably the best thing you'll hear all night is that I'll be extremely brief," he began. "People ask me why I like to come down south. I was sent to the south once by a publisher around the time of THE SHINING, and I like to come down here. I

think if I'd been born in an earlier time I might have been a copperhead. I think if I got tired of Maine I might move to Mississippi, drink Dr. Pepper, and pick my ear with a kitchen match."

"Of course, publishing is headquartered in New York, and they've got the idea that once you get past New Jersey nobody reads, and that isn't true at all."

Wrapping up his remarks, King said, "What I do for a living is I make shit up. The difference is whether you make shit up that could happen or make shit up about haunted hotels."

"I'm delighted to be here, I'm delighted that you're here, and I hope we all live to see tomorrow."

## Straub 'n Streiber

PETER STRAUB

His books are consistently listed on the national best-seller charts, two of his novels have been adapted into motion pictures, and he's currently writing a novel in collaboration with long-time friend Stephen King.

For writer Peter Straub, things could be going better than they have these past few years. With successes like GHOST STORY, SHADOWLAND, and his recent best-seller THE FLOATING DRAGON, it probably seems like a very long time ago that he was struggling to make ends meet as "an academic."

But as Straub recalled during a recent interview at Nashville's "Kubla Khan" science-fiction and fantasy convention, one day he was "seized with the desire to write a novel, so I wrote a book and the first publisher I sent it to took it." His third novel was JULIA, which was made into a film with Mia Farrow, and he's been far too busy to look back ever since.

But according to Straub, "Horror isn't of much use by itself. The point is what that stuff does to the characters. Vampirism could be seen as a metaphor for possessiveness. The thing about horror is that it takes most of the metaphors literally. The dead people really get up and walk — the metaphor is being acted out as if it's a fact."

"One of the most interesting things about what's happened to horror lately is, it's become more like realistic, mainstream novels. I've said that these novels should give all the satisfactions you would get from an ordinary novel, so what you've got is a really warped 19th century novel. I think it's very interesting to use an assumption of an actual world and violate it so you can pump in all kinds of dream-like stuff."

Straub said he always wanted to be a writer and recalled, "I was always wonderful in English and wrote like a grown-up when I was 10 years old. But I thought the idea of making a living at it seemed weird and untrustworthy."

Straub later re-evaluated his position, though, and said, "Once I thought I could make the slightest amount of money

doing it, I started doing it full time. That was about 10 years ago."

Critics are often harsh with Straub because of the explicit violence in his books, but he says, "A lot of horror is about things happening to the body — that your body gets transformed in horrible ways. In THE FLOATING DRAGON when I had people turn to liquid — a lot of people think that's horrible."

Commenting that a writer "has to pay attention to his reviews, he adds, "I can be wounded by bad reviews, but most reviewers don't pay attention to what's going on. In general, I like to get a general sense from reviews of what I'm doing. If they criticize me, I like to do more. I learn from bad reviews — I learn what to do more."

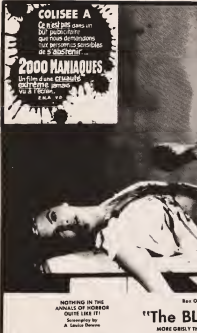
Despite the violence in his novels, Straub has little patience with most contemporary genre movies and says, "Most horror films aren't horror films, but something infinitely more banal." (With a viewpoint like that, maybe Straub could get a job reviewing movies for Cinefantastique!)

Most of his readers who've finished FLOATING DRAGON are now looking forward to THE TALISMAN, which will mark his first collaboration with Stephen King. Explaining how he and King are dividing their work for the new book, Straub says, "We did a very long outline and then we split it up like, 'You go to here, and I'll go to there.'"

At first, things didn't work out as easily as they'd hoped. About a year after starting, Straub said, "We had a thousand pages and we were only on page eight of the outline." Several "drastic revisions" followed to bring the novel down to a manageable length, and a new ending was devised which both authors are very pleased with.

"Stephen King is immensely powerful as a writer," Straub points out, "and he has wonderful instincts. He has an innate ability to make the most of what material he has

continued on page 4



The whole gore handwagon got rolling 20 years ago with scenes like this from **BLOOD FEAST**. At the upper left is an example of one of the Lewis ad mats to be found in the current issue of *Nostalgia*, which also features a transcript of the Lewis ad.



See Office Spectaculars, Inc.

## "The BLOOD FEAST"

MORE GORE THAN EVER IN BLOOD COLOR!

session at the 1981 Gore Gazette party in New York. To order a copy, send an international money order for 30 francs to: BALBO Lucas, 21, Rue Soubise, 93400 St. Ouen, France. (BLOOD FEAST photo courtesy of Steve Allen.)

LEWIS — continued from page 1

THAN YOU EVER WANTED TO KNOW ABOUT MAIL ORDER ADVERTISING which is just published in a new edition — a second edition, and I'm well regarded in that field. And the difference is I work on my own schedule without any attention to a bunch of derelicts who call themselves actors or a bunch of scoundrels who call themselves exhibitors, and I don't have that problem. But the film business has always had a fascination for me and I always had a notion about what people might want to go and see — even though I never spent a lot of money making those films. I've always loved the film business — it's an exciting business. But I'm not about to rick my head in the lion's mouth for no purpose. So the nature of the conversation with him was very, very general. Then somebody called me one day and said, "Have you seen the latest issue of *Fangoria*, which I hadn't, but as it turned out the next day a copy came to me by mail. And it said, "You are about to direct a film called GORE FEAST." The only hard conversations I've had relative to making a picture are with this fellow Maslin for a film called **BLOOD FEAST II**. There's a script of it in my desk, and we are not particularly close to agreement.

DF: Do they have a full script or just a treatment?  
HGL: They have a script that is three times as long as my script I ever had.  
DF: Do you think the running time would go over an hour and a half?

HGL: I think it'd probably be about an hour-and-a-half or an hour and forty minutes because that's the current length based on cable interval of two hours with no commercials in between. In the earlier days our films always ran between 70 and 90 minutes except for *A TASTE OF BLOOD*, which ran two hours.

DF: I think **BLOOD FEAST** was about 70 minutes.  
HGL: Barely. **BLOOD FEAST** was 6,300 feet — barely, because short of 70 minutes you couldn't get first position in a double feature. Later on we began to supply both halves, so the problem didn't exist. But he (Maslin) is anticipating a four-week shooting schedule, that's principal photography — plus two weeks of pre-production. Any my biggest problem with Jimmy Maslin is not his integrity, which I suspect is substantial compared to many people in the film business. I like this fellow. I've never met him face to face, but he strikes me — just as a telephone acquaintance

— as having some integrity.

DF: He's not there in Los Angeles?

HGL: He's in Los Angeles. But my problem is he wants to stick it there.

DF: Has he ever produced a movie before?

HGL: Not as far as I know.

DF: So he doesn't have any real track record.

HGL: No, but what he will have is, number one, the title **BLOOD FEAST II**, which has to get some bookings no matter what happens — no matter how terrible it might be. He called me this week to discuss **BLOOD FEAST II**.

DF: Calden was saying if they did make **BLOOD FEAST II** you would be either creative consultant or director.

HGL: Well, he may well wind up being the director. (Lewis goes to his desk to get the **BLOOD FEAST II** script, then returns with it. We look over the writing credits and notice Calden's name.) Eric Calden — yes his name is on the script. Now they are revising this script. It's a professionally written script. Whoever wrote this has an idea of screenwriting technique — this is the way a script is written, in this format.  
DF: How long has it been since they submitted it to you?  
HGL: This one's dated April 15 and I guess I got it a few days after that with this hand written note (reads a message written on the script's cover), "Dear Herschell, phase one has gone to action, and here is the first draft" and so on. . . I felt it was slightly sophomoric.

DF: They way they're approaching the subject?

HGL: Well, I have tried in the last few pictures I made, combining satire with gore. We reached a point where we were literally repelling ourselves, and I felt to separate the new stuff from the old stuff I'd show a little sophistication.

DF: One of the last ones, **STICK IT IN YOUR EAR** — was that almost strictly satirical?

HGL: **STICK IT IN YOUR EAR** was not a picture I made. I bought that. **STICK IT IN YOUR EAR** is a picture (half a laboratory had for sale, it was called **VORTEX** and the terms of sale were that I change the title or, which is what I did. I hadn't even screened the picture, but I needed a bottom half to go with something. I've forgotten which picture, I think it was **YEAR OF THE YAHOO** or this **STUFF! KILL YOU** — one of those two. And though the picture and retitled it — that's all. But the **GORE GIRLS** . . .

DF: That was one of the best ones.

HGL: Yes, I had a good time with that picture.

DF: In fact, I read in the *Gore Gazette* a couple of weeks ago that it's playing right now at the 8th Street Playhouse in New York every Tuesday night.

HGL: Everything is playing at the 8th Street Playhouse. Someone sent me a tearsheet from the Village Voice. I made a picture in 1964 called **MOONSHINE MOUNTAIN**. Playing at the 8th Street Playhouse is a picture called **BLOOD ON MOONSHINE MOUNTAIN**.

DF: Did they retitle it?

HGL: They just put the word "blood" in there to make it more box office. There isn't that much blood in **MOONSHINE MOUNTAIN**. Anyway, this script — and I offer this only as an opinion and it's inconsequential because they've rewritten it — I felt they tried for satire and wound up with sophisticated humor, college level humor. There's nothing wrong with that, but as motion picture grist you wind up with **KENTUCKY FIED MOVIE** rather than **BLOOD FEAST II**. The reason **BLOOD FEAST** was so spectacularly successful and the reason — to this day — people sit through **TWO THOUSAND MANIACS** like this (puts hands over mouth) with their eyes bulging.

DF: About every video store you go to seems to have copies of **TWO THOUSAND MANIACS** or **BLOOD FEAST**.

HGL: I'm delighted, although Maslin told me he has an argument with the distributor. Anyway, he told me he might or might not release **JUST FOR THE HELL OF IT** and another film I made called **HOW TO MAKE A DOLL**. DF: I saw both of those on a double feature back in '72.  
HGL: Oh yeah, those are old films and **HOW TO MAKE A DOLL** is the world's worst film.

DF: It could really qualify for a G rating.

HGL: Oh yeah, there's nothing in it.

DF: It doesn't have any nudity.

HGL: None. Well, we didn't have any nudity in any . . . even **SUBURBAN ROULETTE** didn't have any.

DF: The **GORE GIRLS** is the only one that had any.

HGL: That's right, that's the only one. Even **THE WIZARD OF GORE** had no nudity. But here in Bill Lucas' *Slazard Express* which came today (shows me a copy of the current issue), here is an ad. It says, "Herschell Gordon Lewis' juvenile delinquency film **JUST FOR THE HELL OF IT** is now available on video — \$45. Free one-sheet with first 20 orders. Maybe it's a test ad from Jimmy Maslin. . . I don't know. I can't answer that. It's a California address — a company I never heard of, but some people change companies the way other people change suits."

DF: It's been about 10 years since I've seen it, but I think the only violence in that movie is when somebody gets their hand put on a frying grill.

HGL: Yes, this fellow with a foreign accent — the restaurant owner.

DF: There's a scene at the beginning where they destroy a room in one take.

HGL: Yes, that's all in one take. We ran a roll and I had three cameras going. One of them in the room, a hand-held (cameras), then the Mitchell camera set up to make the basic shot. We used a Clifden, which is a terrible camera, as a second camera, but it covered the action and we told 'em to just go ahead and smash it (the furniture) to pieces.  
DF: Were these high school people you recruited?

HGL: Yes.

DF: They probably thought it was a lot of fun.  
HGL: Well, we had a little studio we rented and all the end of the shot we just threw everything out in the alley. There was nothing left. All this furniture we had from the Salvation Army. Their function was to smash it to pieces — that was the idea. That's the kind of picture — if we had made on a respectable budget — that would have been a very good winner.

DF: It sort of had the same theme as a **CLOCKWORK ORANGE** and it came several years earlier.

HGL: Well, that's so speciality, to anticipate. For example, when **BONNIE AND CLYDE** appeared — much critical acclaim for that banjo music soundtrack. Well, we did that in **TWO THOUSAND MANIACS** many years earlier.

DF: I love that song you have in **TWO THOUSAND MANIACS**.

HGL: "The South's Gonna Rise Again." (sings) Robert E. Lee broke his musket on his knee. That's my voice on that.  
DF: Oh really?

HGL: Oh yes, I'm a country and western nut anyway — absolutely insane (in that kind of music). I think the greatest musician who ever lived is Chet Atkins.  
DF: We ought to swap jobs. I have to interview a lot of these country stars for the newspaper I write for.

HGL: Well, that's so speciality, to anticipate. For example, when **BONNIE AND CLYDE** appeared — much critical acclaim for that banjo music soundtrack. Well, we did that in **TWO THOUSAND MANIACS** many years earlier.

now appeared for his last 100 personal appearances, which has to be a record for him, but he's not the kind of person I'd want to cast in a movie!

DF: This guy knows a friend of his who used to open up his show for him. He talked George into playing at our local nightclub in Cookeville. He figured since George was his buddy that George wouldn't embarrass him in front of everybody by not showing up. So George did show up, but he was an hour late and real drunk. He sang about 30 minutes and left.

HGL: We used to have just a handful of rules. None of them pertained to talent, they all pertained to attitude. One was no drinking during the day, not during lunch, not at all—no beer, no drinking during the shooting day. And the second was no grass on the set. It's a couple of dumb rules I'd grant you but...

DF: When you're not shooting a movie you can't waste time. HGL: No, you can't waste a minute. We had a fellow show up stoned one day, and we sent him home. And he was in the film. We sat down for about three minutes figuring how to get rid of the part, and it cost us some money to do it, but I can't take that risk.

DF: Even if an actor has to play a drunk person, they still have to remember their marks and where to stand in front of the camera.

HGL: Yes, and for a low budget film you can't have someone lying on the side saying (talks like a drunk), "I'll be out in a second." You can't do it—it's a matter of discipline to stay inside the budget. We'll disagree, but I don't know whether I'll be involved in that film (BLOOD FEAST II) or not because they want to shoot it in California.

DF: Johnny Legend doesn't have anything to do with these guys out in Los Angeles?

HGL: He originally told me he did, but later he and Maslin said they're friends and they've had business relationships, but this is not one of them.

DF: Does Legend seem to have the financial resources to be a producer?

HGL: I haven't the foggiest—I doubt it. A producer is someone who declares himself, that's all. The difference between a producer and a producer who backs in is the difference between an idea and an executed fact—there's no parallel at all, so I don't know. As I say, I'm not that close to these guys. I told Jimmy Maslin that when he's at the point where his thinking is complete, come on down here and actually thrash the thing out with me or another.

DF: Did he say what kind of budget he might be talking about?

HGL: Somewhere between \$250,000 and \$400,000—which is perfectly ample, no matter what he does unless he gets himself involved with unions where he is inextricably tied in where one union demands another.

DF: Would he have to make it as a union picture?

HGL: Not necessarily.

DF: Would he be shooting in 35mm?

HGL: Oh sure. I can't imagine him shooting it in 16. There's no reason to shoot in 16 anymore—you just save that money. Walt Disney used to shoot his nature films in 16mm because he wanted very small equipment in these rat's burrows or wherever he was hiding to watch the animals, so if you're going up to the frozen north, you don't want something that's going to be a huge burden. You tend to be in the medium with which you're comfortable. I was always comfortable in 35 because, first of all, it's easier to see.

DF: Were all your movies made in 35 all the way back?

HGL: Always. Even the very first one, THE PRIME TIME show was shot in 35. It was easier for me because I owned the content.

DF: I've noticed too that when these movies are out on tape like BLOOD FEAST, the picture quality seems even better than at the theatre.

HGL: Yes, I was 'very' pleased... well, I'll tell you what happened. The nature of Eastman color film which is the best of the dyes, colorized or mylar. This is the magenta dye, the chrome dye, the cyan dye—that is red, yellow and blue. These are the dyes in the film. Over a period of time the red dye begins to fade. There's no way you can prevent it—it's an aging process. And if you look at any of Eastman's color films, you'll see that. The Technicolor was shot on black and white film, but Eastman color film ages so the reds leech out and the color became weak. So I had seen a print of BLOOD FEAST and it was horrible. Aside from all the scratches and the (noise) where the soundtrack had been cut up or some projectionist had taken some frames out.

DF: I have a two minute preview to it in super 8mm and it was always faded where the blood was all pink, so when I got this video copy I was surprised how so bright and red.

HGL: Oh yes, I liked that. I think they did a very nice job. I went to New York City about a year and a half ago and a fellow named Rick Sullivan—do you know Rick Sullivan?

DF: He does the Gore Gazette.

HGL: Uh huh—the Gore Gazette. Very nice fellow and, like you, he's a literate—he's not some nincompoop. He had a screening and what he did he screen but THE WIZARD OF GORE which is one of my least favorite films because that's one where I don't think the effects came off well. That was a problem picture from a production point of view—everything went wrong. We had camera trouble, we had processing trouble, we had actor trouble—it was just one of those.

DF: You'd said in a previous interview, I think, that you couldn't get the ending you wanted because you wanted to have a woman split right down the middle...

HGL: Yes, well, when I looked at that film again after some years I realized how much better it would have been if we'd done what I wanted to do. Any, my instructions were explicit, I wanted a goat carcass. I wanted the carcass fleshed out with mortician's wax. I'm sure you've been in a situation where you have an image of exactly what you want, and any variation from that is wrong.

DF: You could have had the legs of the goat covered over like...

HGL: Yes, as long as it's with mortician's wax you literally sculpt a body. But inside the sculpting is all the viscera. And inside that we would inject all the stage blood that it would hold along with our usual ingredients...cranberry fruit and some stuff, so that the blood, while always very good for gore, some karyocaine to give it some thickness. It would have been... take my word, I know exactly what I wanted. Nobody got the carcass. It was one of these Keystone Cop crews and the result was we began putting pieces onto this girl, and that was the worst thing I've done. And that was difficult, too. He couldn't rip that carcass to shreds, because what I wanted to do was have that carcass 'sit' about three feet away and just watch that carcass get ripped to pieces.

DF: All in one take...

HGL: All in one take. It's like that where somebody suggested that eyeball. If we cut away the scene is destroyed, but because we sit on it, and we sit and we sit 'mercilessly' and he's squeezing and fighting (squeezes his fist for emphasis) and finally that eyeball splits—that's what makes that scene effective. Cutaways are not effective.

DF: Because everybody thinks it's all done in the editing.

HGL: Uh huh. So we didn't do it. So that effect will have to remain for some other film.

DF: What they did instead was have the ending where he appeared in the limousine out and she comes back to life...

HGL: Well, that 'was' supposed to happen, but it was supposed to happen where that would have been a cut to the head only, and then we were going to cut back to the audience while she's sitting in the audience and the whole episode starts all over again. But it's the wonderful world of make-up. Anyway, Rick had a booting limousine and I was embarrassed by the quality—it was like it'd been soaked in beer.

DF: There was an ad a few months ago in The Big Reel where somebody had a 16mm copy of THE WIZARD OF GORE and they were selling it for \$95.

HGL: Well, somebody's making videotapes of that. Fred and Jerry Sandy, who were my partners on that picture, I guess still own the rights. I found out only this week that Fred Sandy is still alive.

DF: THE WIZARD OF GORE is out in video stores.

HGL: I don't know. It is in the form of a tape.

DF: I have it, the picture quality's real good.

HGL: Well, Jimmy Maslin is nice enough to send me copies of the tapes, but with the Sandys I don't think I'll get one. I've read that that tape is being pulled because there's a legal problem.

DF: The tape will be. The ownership is very, very cloudy. Apparently there's a fellow in Chicago named Harry Goodman who had laid claim somehow. But there again, I'm a little surprised no one has contacted me to say, "Hey, what's going on." But I don't care, my ownership is gone, I'm out of it. I'm long since divorced from those tapes.

DF: Even when they're selling the video copies of BLOOD FEAST and TWO THOUSAND MANIACS you don't get royalties from that?

HGL: That's all sold off, it's like the fellows who invented Super 8—remember that? They were down on the rocks. I'm fortunate that I'm not falling back to mouth, but if I were I wouldn't count on anyone in the film business to bail me out. So anyway, if some negotiation can bring that down here...

DF: When I talked to Calden about it he said they were

looking at a September start...that was a couple of months ago.

HGL: Oh, I think they're still hoping for that.

DF: They said they wanted to shoot everything in California—nothing here.

HGL: Well, that's the California attitude. You will find two places in this country that are so insular—they can't believe people anywhere else (are anything but) barbarians. One is New York City, and the other, people believe that civilization ends at the Hudson River, and the other is California, which is literally on another planet. The reason I thought it made sense to shoot it down here... since a couple of articles have appeared—there was something in the local newspaper, the local movie critic unearthed me. He read it in Fangoria or somewhere that I lived here, and he interviewed me and that appeared in the paper. People are coming out of the woodwork. The fellow who played the lead in BLOOD FEAST who lives in Duane, he lives in Duane (near Duane). The fellow who played Fawcett Ramsey, Mal Arnold, phoned me, he lives in Miami but he's moving to Plantation.

(Lewie gets a phone call about the Rolls Royce he had shipped from England)

HGL: (reaching in) It wasn't quite in the condition it was supposed to be and the paint was blistering.

DF: Did it arrive very recently?

HGL: Oh yes, it got here a week, ten days ago.

DF: Did you get your De Lorean before the company had all that trouble?

HGL: Ya, I got the third car in Broward County, it was the first automatic shift car.

DF: They've got those wing doors?

HGL: Uh huh. It's a fine car.

DF: Can you get it serviced here?

HGL: Ya, you can get it serviced. I took it to the Rolls dealer, who fell in line with that car. He said, "Oh gee, can I drive it?" All right, let's continue—what can I tell you of any consequence?

DF: I've read in this new book that's out—MIDNIGHT MOVIES—that when your movies were being released here in the early days, they were also shown a little bit in Belgium and...

HGL: Oh sure, we had a pretty good payoff in the continent. Now England had a rule, you couldn't show this type of film except in private clubs. We had a pretty good payoff in England, France, Germany and Japan. I think Austria has had a play-it, I again, last touch. Once you're out of a deal you don't really care that much what happens to, but the foreign sale was increasingly strong and I understand it's still going on, because there are now places that permit the showing of this type of film that didn't before. Canada, I don't know. I've seen Canadian-made films that had gone to them.

DF: Like the David Cronenberg movies.

HGL: Yes. So foreign sales are a factor. The business has grown to a point where there are markets that didn't exist 20 years ago. Cable videotape, and if ever there were films that are perfect for cable and videotape it's our films because they don't fall into a normal category. That's what separates cable films from stuff that'll appear at 9 o'clock on channel 4.

DF: I read one place that you used to be a college English professor.

HGL: Uh huh, I taught English and the humanities at Mississippi State.

DF: How did you make the translation from that into doing movies?

HGL: I left Mississippi State and went into broadcasting. I was married to a radio station, first in Iowa, then in Wisconsin, Penn, and then in Racine, Wis. There I got into television with WKY-TV in Oklahoma City. From there I became a television director of an advertising agency in Chicago and I went back to Chicago and stayed there a while and I just bought videotapes as film as part of my film and then, I guess, the film business—natural transitions.

DF: One of your early movies had Karen Black in it.

HGL: Yes, we had Karen Black in her first film. I had Harvey Korman, who is now fairly well-known as a comedian. We had Tim Holt. He caught him, not on the way out, but on the way down, and... they came through the smelter in the willies. Harvey Korman was a consummate actor even then. He was in LIVING VENUS—very easy to work with. Again, I have no idea what happens to people's egos with

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# Interview with John Russo

by TIM FERRANTE

The name of John Russo is familiar to every fright fan, having scripted the mega-hit film **NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD**. John has since continued this success with a series of erotic film assignments and an impressive string of best-selling novels. Two of his latest works, the feature film **1000 NIGHTS** (based on his fourth novel) and the recently published **THE AWAKENING**, serve as prime examples of his brilliance as filmmaker and writer.

Born in 1939, John Russo attended West Virginia University and graduated in 1961. He then served two years in the army. Upon his discharge, he linked up with George Romero and Russell Streiner and produced educational and industrial films for the following five years. Then, in 1968,

Tim Ferrante: How old were you when **NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD** was released?

JR: Russo: "Twenty-nine. George Romero, Russ Streiner and I are all the same age. We've all been friends since high school. We were all from different colleges but George came here from New York to go to Carnegie Tech, which is now Carnegie Mellon. Russ was at the Pittsburgh Playhouse. Another associate of ours, Rudy Ricci, was at Carnegie Tech and he met George and then we all met each other that way. All of us were interested in writing and making films so we eventually got together and formed a company. We were producing commercial and industrial films and looking forward to doing features someday. So on, literally, the very week we owned our first 35mm camera we started talking about making a feature. I remember **THE LIVING DEAD** eventually came out of that.

TF: I know that the story of **NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD** was a collaboration between you and George, but do you mostly responsible for putting it into what it is?

JR: No, George was mostly responsible because he had written about half of the story. He and I were both hanging out at different things to try and come up with something that could be our first feature. One weekend George went away and wrote about half the story and everybody liked it, so then he was tied up, he had a client on the string... a series of commercials or something that he had to have done on a deadline. And then I took the material and some said that he and I and a couple of other people liked it and I reverse the first half and I wrote the second half of the story. The production of the film was pretty much a group project, but once again, George was the lead. George was the director. At that time, he was the guy in our group.

TF: In **NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD** there is a very violent jump-cut in a basement scene where Karl Hardman's head abruptly turns. This cut has baffled many fans. Can you explain it?

JR: We had to cut five or six minutes out of the picture. The Reorganization wanted it cut down and the basement scene got done for another five minutes. Nobody has ever asked me that. You say it disturbs the fans? It's kind of upsetting...

TF: No, no. It doesn't disturb the fans... just baffles them.

JR: I'm not disputing your word. I just never heard it mentioned. This is the first time anyone ever asked me.

TF: There are plenty of things I could ask you about that picture. I just don't want to dwell on it. I could look you for a couple of hours talk about **NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD**. It's just that there are many chronological boo-boos in it... such as headlights being in perfect condition where a few scenes before they were broken... things like that.

JR: Well, do you want to know about the headlights? (Laughs)

TF: Sure, but first more about the basement scene...

JR: Well, the Reorganization said it played too long and five minutes had to come out. There were no cutaway shots available.

TF: Nothing? You mean that same scene carried on for five more minutes... that same master shot?

JR: Yes. So I simply matched Karl's head as best I could!

TF: Okay, the headlights...

JR: We had bought a truck for the headlights because we knew we were going to blow it up. The truck was on its last legs... we got to the house, it just died. Nobody could get it started again. We got another truck, just by luck someone lived around there had a truck exactly the same! So we used that truck when it had to be moving. Of course the

headlights weren't broken.

TF: You couldn't have just busted the headlights? JR: No, we didn't do that... I guess we could have... but we figured it'd be hell to wait. We just towed the other truck when we were going to blow it up. They drove the good one to the gas pumps.

TF: How about the table leg? When Duane Jones throws it on the back of a burning chair. But it was already on the back of the chair before he throws it.

JR: I'd have to say I never noticed that one. I'd have to look for that.

TF: No kidding? That's a beauty... At one time I recall counting 11 stools.

JR: Well, it's not surprising. Most of those nights scenes were shot in the daytime. We put black seamless over the windows of the place on the interiors. Some of the time the room would have to be boarded up and some of the time it would have to be half boarded... .

TF: Yeah, different phases... JR: So all those boards had to be labeled. Lower front window... upper front door... so we could put them back in the same place. They had to be changed a zillion times so continuity was a bitch. People like Keith Wayne was doing rock shows and he'd be flying in at certain times. That and the extreme hassle it was to make the film... it's not surprising there are continuity problems. There are not many in **MIDNIGHT** incidentally. Although it was the same kind of hassle.

TF: Please don't misunderstand! I'm not some prick that just wants to pick apart and make fun of people. I appreciate what is on the screen. It's just fun to see how you hid your tracks! What has become of the actors?

JR: Karl Hardman and Marilyn Eastman still produce commercial and industrial films and radio commercials in Pittsburgh. Their company is called Hardman/Eastman Associates. Russ Streiner is in charge of broadcast production for a big agency, Creamer, Inc. they have a New York office and a Pittsburgh office.

TF: Didn't he marry Judy Rideney?

JR: Yes, they were divorced now. Judith has remarried.

TF: How about Keith Wayne?

JR: I don't know what happened to Keith. He was a singer. He was a good singer. He was on tour with the State Department after the picture was made and then never heard from him. More after that, Judy O'Dey lives in California and is still involved in theatre and stage productions. I don't really know much about what she does. Duane Jones lives in New York and I have not heard from him in a number of years.

TF: And Kyra Schon. She is Karl Hardman's daughter, right?

JR: I never knew Kyra well. I only saw her when we would film. I don't think I've seen much of her since then. I should ask Karl...

TF: How was the picture when it was filmed still standing?

JR: No, it was due to be bulldozed and we used it before it was demolished.

TF: How did the initial sales of the first edition of the **NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD** book go... The Warner Books version?

JR: They printed 50,000 copies and sold them out. Then they never printed anymore.

TF: So there only 50,000 copies? Whew...!

JR: Yeah, of the Warner version.

TF: What about the other books version?

JR: Well, I'm still selling that. It's still going so I don't know where those figures are now. But they're probably getting up close to 100,000 in sales.

TF: I was great of them to reprint that for everybody that missed from the first go-round. But I'm surprised that it had such a small run, the original.

JR: Yeah, I thought it could have... well, any of these things, if they get the right push and there are enough copies printed and put in the stores then they could... especially that book! It was such a famous item, you could have thought it would have come out with more copies. But they didn't.

TF: How about RETURN OF THE LIVING DEAD? It's somewhat of a cult item and many people don't know about that book.

JR: Well, I'm going to revise it and make it better than the edition that was out.

TF: Do you go to the movies much?

JR: Yeah, we used to go to the movies a lot. But I have six months old baby now and it's hard to get out. So I end up

watching a lot of things on HBO.

TF: What are some of your favorite films?

JR: I like some old movies. I like to watch the old John Wayne movies. Things like **RED RIVER**...

TF: Well, what would be your favorite western?

JR: Favorite western? One of the ones I liked a lot was the one with Katherine Hepburn and John Wayne.

TF: ROOSTER COCKLE.

JR: Yeah, it's really a good picture. It's like THE AFRICAN QUEEN set in the West.

TF: How about horror? And don't say **MIDNIGHT**! (Laughs)

JR: I like POLTERGEIST. But not that this is a favorite film or anything, but the thing I liked about SCANNERS was it had a lot of energy. Cronenberg seems to put a lot of energy into his projects. It reminds me of the group of us when we were a lot younger and made **NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD**.

TF: He is ambitious. I enjoyed RAID a lot.

JR: I haven't seen any of the others, just SCANNERS... but I liked that. There were some things I didn't like about it but that kind of crazy energy is good. I liked CREEP, but SHOW, George's film. I don't like all of George's films, but I was entertained by CREEPSHOW. I used to read TALES FROM THE CRYPT when I was a kid. I really read a lot of them. I liked them. And to me, the movie was just like the comic books and I think that some of the critics that think the movie probably was a little bit more like comic books and didn't know what George was trying to do.

TF: He really achieved the look of a comic book. His blacklisting, photography, lighting... everything was done well...

JR: I liked MARTIN. Did you see that?

TF: No, but I'm told it is very good.

JR: I think it may be my best film after **NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD**.

TF: On to your books. What prompted the idea of THE AWAKENING? It's such a spectacular and wonderful idea and you handled it so well.

JR: Thanks. I've always been interested in history. I knew a lot about the Fort Pitt Museum (an important setting in THE AWAKENING. T.F.) and the French and Indian War and so on, you know, going back to the Revolutionary War days. When I used to make commercial and industrial films, I made two tourist films for the Fort Pitt Museum. So, I learned a lot more about it. I tried to make THE AWAKENING entertaining, scary and even funny. I had a great time writing it. It has more social commentary than any of my other books.

TF: Did the character of Lenora Clayton reflect you somewhat?

JR: No, not really. She just had a little 8mm camera. I don't think of her at all as being me. It's a totally different bag when you're making a professional film. Another interesting thing is that this idea, well maybe the germ of it, started 15 years ago. George Romero and I, after **NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD**, were talking about what to do next. I had an idea about a group of people shipwrecked and they end up on an island. The first 20 minutes or so of the script was going to deal with their efforts to establish themselves and take care of their wounded and find food and shelter and so on. One day they find some evidence that someone other than them are on this island... like the remains of a fire or whatever. And just as they're puzzling over that, this furious attack is launched upon them. They're attacked by wild crazy people that have... well, they're wearing three-corner hats and they have rusty gold coins that they use as clubs and all this shit and they look like cretins!

TF: I love it!

JR: It turns out that the island is populated by descendants of French soldiers that were on their way to America to fight in the Revolution and got wrecked. Anyway, it was going to be a conflict between the 18th century with the 20th, you know, and the differences through the eyes of these people who were going to fight in the noble cause of the Revolution. Anyhow... this thing of some refugees from the past meeting the present was in my head and then I thought of doing it with a very modern twist. I've never read vampire books to tell you the truth. Never read one... not even DRACULA.

TF: Not even Stephen King's SALEM'S LOT?

JR: No, I've read two of his books, CUJO and FRIESTARTER. He's a terrific writer. But of the movies I've seen or the things I've heard about, I've read, it seems that they all deal with these vampires going around doing evil things.

Nobody gets into what it's like to be reborn into a strange milieu. I wanted to deal with that in THE AWAKENING. TF: You did break away from the traditional vampire to a great extent. Him walking around in the daylight and seeing his own reflection. I was wondering when in the book you would come out with the "catch" as to why he was able to walk in the sun, why he was able to see his reflection. . . JR: Why not?

TF: . . . and why he didn't go around biting into necks? JR: Yeah, but why should he have done the other things? The other things are just myths and traditions. Nobody knows if they're right or wrong and neither do I. If there were a vampire, why 'should' he have to sleep in the daytime?

TF: He just liked blood. . . You do ever frighten yourself to the point where you have to walk away from the typewriter or you get struck a nerve in your own mind as to what is terrifying?

JR: No. I don't really get frightened. If I'm trying to think of the next scene in a book or screenplay, and I know generally where I'm going but I have to now write the next thing that's going to happen, I might pace the floor until I start getting images that seem striking, but they don't "scare" me. It's just that I start feeling something happening or visualizing the sequence of how it should happen. If it seems like the images are striking or graphic or it'll be a grabber, they they kind of hook me into it and one image spawns another one. But I'm not being scared. They're not scaring me, they're intriguing me. It's closer to it. I never get scared by anything I write.

TF: When I read MIDNIGHT, the segment where the goons were impersonating the police officers, that wiped me out. JR: Well, I'm glad to hear it. (Laughs).

TF: You have no idea how much that book disturbed me. It hit the mark. It was frightening. JR: But that might be the difference when you're the one making it. I don't get scared reading anybody else's. . . there's a lot of things I like. . . I like CUJO's but I don't get this thing where people say, "Your teeth will be chattering when you read this," or "Your heart will be racing." I never quite believe it. I always think they're just exaggerating.

TF: No, they're not. JR: It just never gets to me that way. I know I'm just reading a book and nothing in it is going to come through to me and grab me. I could be more scared walking down a dark street when I'm half loaded and it's two o'clock in the morning and I have to go to the car lot. . . TF: That I think everyone would be scared by. If I read something and it strikes the right nerve, I'm just useless. I'm afraid to get up and go to the bathroom! I'd be afraid there's a guy in there impersonating a cop that wants to shoot me! (Laughs)

TF: What is your opinion of the horror novels written today? JR: The quality of the work is improving. The public seems to crave terror/suspense/horror novels at the present time. The competition is going to get a lot tougher. The ideas are going to get more sophisticated because readers will accept and demand it before they buy. TF: Let's talk about your film MIDNIGHT. When was it shot? JR: From March until October of 1980.

TF: And the total budget? JR: The budget was \$70,000.

TF: And you fit it into that budget? JR: Yup.

TF: How about problems? JR: There are lots of problems when you only have that much money. And you're shooting in 35mm. There was one funny incident. . . to me it was funny. . . about the funniest thing while making it. We were working in a building that had been broken into a number of times, doing the editing. We had an electric eye thing where if somebody came into the hall, it would set off a bell in the editing room. Paul McCullough, who was the editor, and I would come in around seven o'clock in the morning and work on through. We were running the scene back and forth where the character "Black" gets kicked in the balls. We were making who to make the cut, so while we were running the picture and sound through the moviola, you kept hearing these screams. Then the bell ding! I rolled back in my chair and I was wearing some scruffy jeans and a tee-shirt or whatever. I looked down the hall and I didn't see anybody. This young guy in a suit and tie came running around the corner. He stared at me and I stared at him. Finally he said, "Are you a . . . dentist?"

(Laughs)

TF: And he was hoping like hell I was a dentist because if I wasn't, I was probably butchering somebody back there!

TF: Great story! How long did it take to cut the picture? JR: Oh, I don't know. About five weeks I guess.

TF: Were there any editing goofs in MIDNIGHT?

JR: I don't think there are any. . . except that the big guy. . . he was in a play and we thought we were done shooting and he had shaved his beard off. Then we shot that stuff in the cemetery so I had to shoot him from behind. I wanted a wide shot that showed him in the background. But the trees were too small to hide behind. Paul said he wasn't sure the shot was wide enough that you wouldn't see that the beard wasn't there. So it was one of those little things where we were running out of time and film and everything else so I told him to put his arm over his face and crouch. I just got done that way. The character is a big dumb guy anyway. . . TF: Since you've read Donald Farmer's review of your film in the first issue of the SPATTER TIMES, I'm sure you'd love to respond to it!

JR: Well, by today's standards, NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD had a budget six or eight times what MIDNIGHT did. Farmer states that George Romero was obviously the guy who had the talent. Well, George has never made a movie on the budget MIDNIGHT was made on. He's always had many many more dollars. Even though he's made low budget movies, his lowest budget had three or four times the money I did. Plus a whole staff and organization behind it! Of course now, since DAWN OF THE DEAD, CREEPSHOW, and KNIGHTRIDERS, he's had budgets running in the millions of dollars. You're really comparing apples and oranges. When George saw MIDNIGHT, he said, "My hat is off to you. . . you did a hell of a job. I don't see how you could make a movie on that kind of money!"

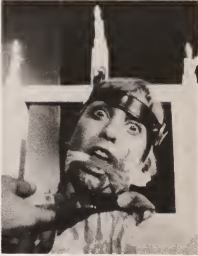
Today's market, with the big budgets and lavish special effects that there are in everything. . . well, we don't have any of that. I just expect just the real diehard fans are going to be disappointed. But instead, a little bit of the reverse has happened. Some of the diehard fans like it better than I would think.

TF: Well, what is your opinion of the movie as a whole? JR: I think it's a darn good job for the money. For \$70,000 dollars, I don't think I could do any better. I think it's a good job for that kind of money, frankly. I think you could give any of the recognized names that would look at this picture and put it down. . . you give them \$70,000. . . they wouldn't do as good a job. And the people in the industry who've seen it, well, they can't believe it. Until they know they're saying, "Well why didn't you do it better than that?" But once they know the budget they say, "Jesus Christ, there is nobody doing 'anything' for that!" The only way we would have done more was to shoot in 16mm and blow it up. We maybe should have shot in 35 because then content-wise, it would have been a much better picture. Of course you would have a grainier looking release print.

Another thing I'd like to say in defense of MIDNIGHT is that when I wrote the script back in 1977, and even while the film was being made, most of the pictures like FRIDAY THE 13th and HALLOWEEN and the whole gist of those pictures, hadn't happened yet. So once MIDNIGHT was released last year, a lot of things that would have frightened an audience, well, by that time they saw MIDNIGHT, they'd seen those things at least 15 times already. If MIDNIGHT could have come out when it was first written, it would have had more impact. When your movie comes out last year, it's got a lot of imitation with it.

TF: Judging by early ad art, it appears that MIDNIGHT was geared more towards a MACON COUNTY LINE-type film. What was the source of the ad campaigns look before it reached the horror slant?

JR: The very first ad that appeared in Variety, though it was never intended for theatres but simply announcing the picture to the trade, was a thing with a clock and a screaming face. . . an antique watch with a screaming face behind the hands. . . and they knew it was a bad idea. Then we came up with a clock design with the hands pointing to midnight and in the middle of the clock there was the same screaming face. There were variations on that. . . one version, instead of a screaming face, had a skull, but then there was a picture called NEW YEARS EVIL and they came out with a similar design. So Sam Sherman had to change the ads. He and I came up with the MACON COUNTY LINE thing. (This campaign featured three photos of "missing youths" across the top border and a large depiction of one of the main characters dressed up as a police officer. He holds a rifle and his clothes T.F.). A lot of people liked the new ads but the foreign distributors didn't. They said they didn't want anything with a cop in the ad. So Sam was at first going to do two separate campaigns. He was trying to come up with something that could go to Europe and he had Gray Morrow do a full color painting. And that was going to be for Europe. (This painting and one-sheet is a striking piece of



Another victim of Tom Savini's make-up effects gets an ear to ear throat slitting in MIDNIGHT. (Photo courtesy of John Russo).

art. It captures the essence of the film perfectly. It blends the "you're on the run" theme and the macabre aspects instead of the straight horror approach. T.F.) Then Sam decided it looked so good that he might use it well for the United States and Europe! It turned out that it didn't look as good when reduced for newspapers and it just didn't draw the people into the theatres. So he decided to go for the horror approach and became up with the mother and the blood drinking.

TF: What was Tom Savini's involvement? JR: He did the decastration shot and the girl in the trap. He also did the throat slittings. Ray Laine and I did the stuff in the last ten minutes. He, Greg Egan, and I did the effects. . . the gun shots. . . fire. . . make-up. . .

TF: If given a Hollywood budget, what would you film? JR: I'd kinda like to make THE AWAKENING. But probably more than that right now. I'd decide to make PREHUMAN. You could probably make it for a couple of million dollars, but I could make it for a lot less!

(Laughs)

TF: You probably could. . . JR: I could probably make that for three or four hundred thousand.

TF: What is the status of the RETURN OF THE LIVING DEAD problem?

JR: It's up in the air. It's so totally unresolved that I don't know what's going to happen. I don't know what the O'Bannon script is like. I've never seen it. I don't know what the next step is going to be. We should probably skip this because there is nothing specific I can say about it. I have a problem there that has to be legally ironed out sometime.

TF: You mentioned PREHUMAN. . . is this what's on the typewriter now?

JR: Yes, I'm working on it as a screen play. I have a caption on the title page that goes, "Something strange lives in the forest. Something almost like us. Something prehuman. . . " It deals with half-neanderthal, half-ape creatures in present times.

TF: Do you have a commitment on this?

JR: No, I can't get commitments until I write them so I'm writing this one in the form of a screenplay and then it could become a book. I'll send it to my agent when it's done and maybe my editor. And I don't know yet if I'm going to produce it as a film or sell it to somebody else to produce a film. It has echoes of E.T. in it, only in reverse.

TF: Could it eventually be your new book?

JR: I don't know yet. My editor has one now called DAY CARE. I'm waiting to hear if he thinks it should be the next book. It deals with brain implants where people can control human emotions.

TF: One final question. Do you see yourself working with George Romero in the future?

JR: I guess it's possible. We're not talking about it, but it's not out of the question I guess.

TF: Thank you John and continued success.

# Frank Henenlotter on "Basket Case"

By PAT HOLLIS

BASKET CASE was one of the most eagerly awaited independent releases of 1982. Thanks to advance notices by Bob Martin (editor of Fangoria), it promised to be an original, bloody, and twisted "B" horror movie.

What happened next has to be one of the most bizarre controversies of recent memory. First Analysis picked it up for distribution, which sounded good, so far, since they had released MANIAC uncensored. Then word gets out that they planned to cut it to a "R" rating and emphasize the comedic aspects. The next thing you hear is that it's going to be given a midnight only run, in only a few cities and on a limited basis, to be built by word of mouth (which, in retrospect, was the worst blunder).

After all this, I thought it was time for Frank Henenlotter to offer his opinions about BASKET CASE, its release pattern, and his future in films.

I interviewed Frank Henenlotter by phone in late May of 1983. He sounded like a true fan of violent horror and, like myself, grew up rooting for the monster in 50's horror movies. We talked about a number of subjects, even jokingly discussing a sequel to BASKET CASE where Beal meets the babies from IT'S ALIVE. He also spoke of his beginning in movies, and a few tidbits from his forthcoming release in the interview that follows.

**PAT HOLLIS:** How did you initially get started making movies before BASKET CASE?

**FRANK HENENLOTTER:** Oh, 8mm. Just tons of 8mm, 13 mm, etc., etc.

**PH:** You didn't attend NYU...

**FR:** Oh, God. That's probably the worst thing that could happen to anybody who wants to get into film. You learn more just by picking up a camera and running out and doing it yourself.

**PH:** So, after the 8mm stuff, you decided to make BASKET CASE?

**FR:** Yeah, well, I was already playing around with some 16mm films also, and it was just a matter of having... but I didn't have the money to do more than 20 minutes, a half hour, stuff like that. Nothing to be released commercially. But, I just figure, why not? Let's just go for a 30-minute budget. And then you wrote BASKET CASE, directed it, and who was your producer?

**FR:** Edgar Elvens...

**PH:** And, where did you get the money to put this together?

**FR:** Well, we really didn't! That's the reason it took like six months to shoot on weekends, then we'd get a bit of money

and spent through on two weeks and then have to go back to weekends and stuff. It was all, we started on my money and Edgar's money of just shooting and as we were getting it, I kept assembling parts of the film, not the whole thing, but just parts that we could show to other people and then we'd get more money and more money as we're going along and finally, when we were finished... I was able to do a rough cut, then we got people who came in and put some decent money in to let us finish it properly.

**PH:** Where in this process did you find some of the people who worked with you? Like the black booker whom I thought was fantastic.

**FR:** Well, I've seen her in an off-Broadway with Divine called WOMEN BEHIND BARS, and she's fabulous.

**PH:** Isn't she Tom McEwen who did that?

**FR:** Yup. She played JoJo the Bounce Washington, and it was just terrific. It was just great, and it was a good show. I knew someone else in the cast, and I kept going to see it over and over again on the weekends, and I just felt Beverly was terrific, so, fine, I could use her.

**PH:** What about Kevin Kenerly?

**FR:** Kevin, he's somebody like me, not the other people in the cast where I've met and just know socially over the years. But, I had worked with Kevin briefly in one of my 16mm films and he was just great to work with... he does all these sculptures in stone. I just went out to see his stuff the other day at this gallery opening he'd just had, but real great and weird stuff. He's even got a stop piece there that will eventually be... it's labeled Dwayne Bradley. I was finished, I don't know where it headed, but it looks good.

**PH:** So, then, you went through, it took you about six months to shoot with the people assembled. Where in that did Bob Martin and the old publicity wheel start turning for you?

**FR:** That didn't happen... First of all, we didn't bring Bob Martin into it. Bob Martin was brought in by someone else and that was long after the film was finished and Bob went to a distributor screening. It was when you show films to the distributors, you can't bring them all there at once, they don't want that. It's not smart to let everybody know you do... although it's obvious you're going to go to everybody in town, right. So, you just hire different ones and Michael Weldon brought Bob Martin there, and I'd never met Bob Martin till long after I had read what he had written in print which startled the hell out of me.

**PH:** Really?

**FR:** Yah, I know it sounds like he's on a payroll now or something, but, you know, honest to God, I read the first thing which was a little thing in Monster Vision, and I read it at work and my first reaction was, 'Oh, shit! Someone took our title.' It didn't even occur to me that he could have been writing about our film. I really like the guy a lot, and he was at our birthday party for the film here and everything like that, and certainly with the next one I'm going to give Bob Martin anything he wants. Let him cover anything he wants, but we really didn't meet him until it was almost sold. [His interview was conducted before Martin's apparent departure from Fangoria. Ed.]

**PH:** It seemed like Fangoria was building it up and included it as the breakthrough in terms of a lot of the new independent stuff getting released and then at some point after the movie came out, the situation about its X versus R rating came up.

**FR:** Yes, which is a bullshit controversy that should never have happened to this film, and that is simply the distributor thinking he was going to do something clever. I mean, the film to me was never an X rated film, it was an R from beginning to end, and maybe, like everything else, we would have had to back back on one, or a film shot here or there. Maybe. But, I still think, the film today would get an R rating. I just don't think it's an X, and I shot it as an X. For God's sake, I would have thrown something more than blood in there. There's only blood, you know. It was never an X.

**PH:** After you see VIDEODROME and John Carpenter's THE THING, and stuff like that, BASKET CASE is mild. **FR:** Of course! I know, and you know. Anytime I get letters of kids asking me why I only show the R, I say, 'Listen, don't hold me back for the X film, that's all. What they did was they thought that I was being too brutal, but I'm at midnight and brought in Ben Barahovich who did ERASERHEAD and a whole bunch of others, and he decided, I don't know if it was him or what, but it was generally decided that the film would play better to highlight the comedy, and that is why they took the blood out. It's just a ridiculous argument, and it wasn't that they thought the film would get an X, but they thought that it would attract more audiences as a comedy. So the moment they cut the blood out, it just upset the whole proportion between the horror in it, and I didn't know what to make of it, and it just became a real sloppy film.

**PH:** It seemed like after that controversy and Analysis deciding to push it, I believe, if anything, it should have been shown either at the drive-in or at one of the independent movie houses here just as a straight run.

**FR:** So do I.

**PH:** At the showing I was at about 30 people showed up, and the first thing that happened is the head of the theatre went and said, 'Listen, we'll get the X rated version if enough people show up.' It kills the word of mouth.

**FR:** I would have just said, 'Well, I'll come back when you get the X. It's my money.' It's ridiculous. I don't know why the film hasn't played kind of great yet. A good example of the two versions — when it opened here in New York, April 9th last year, they opened it with the cut version. And, it had a great opening weekend and from then on it started going downhill. But it was doing well enough to linger for a month or two, but not much longer than that, and after something like that and the only reason the theatre didn't pull it was they didn't have something to show at midnight yet. So, it was just lingering in there, and I guess they figured what the hell, what do they have to lose at this point, and then the July 8th weekend, after three months of it playing with cuts, slipped the uncensored version. They didn't tell me, Edgar or anybody, they just slipped it in. What happened is the word of mouth on that changed around so that four weeks later it was doing sell out business. And, it is still there. I mean, there is a difference of which version works and which version doesn't at midnight. I think this week is its 60th weekend there in the uncensored version so obviously the version works. You figure they would have learned, but even down in Texas now, they opened with the cut version in Houston and the uncensored version in Dallas. Houston folds after three months and Dallas goes along for nine or ten. There's a real difference in which one is working and which one isn't. Then they even, I don't know how many prints they had made, but apparently they've mixed up the prints so that now there's some places like, I know, when it played in Chicago, it was uncensored except for the first murder. That was cut. That doesn't make any sense. Then they showed it somewhere else and it was totally uncensored except for the surgery scene which is missing. What does an audience



A menacing monster mitt (excuse the alliteration) from BASKET CASE. (Photo courtesy of Frank Henenlotter).



think? They wonder why they are being killed on this shot.

**PH:** They Analysis said it to Media?

**PH:** Analysis didn't sell it to Media... Edgar Elven sold it to Media.

**PH:** And, apparently, at least here in the cities, it's doing well.

**PH:** You know what's even better, it's on Billboard's top 40 bestselling video tapes in the country. Figure that one out. I can't.

**PH:** I can.

**PH:** I don't know. No one has seen the film so why should it be selling?

**PH:** VIDEOBOMB in the cities. It stayed here less than a week. Totally bombed. It came out on video cassette. There's stores who have ordered six or seven copies. It's never in the store. I've talked to different store owners and they say, "It's never in here, people love it." And there's this thing that a lot of movies are a little extreme or ones that you hear about but you don't get to see, for one reason or another, and they do great on tape.

**PH:** But enough to get on the top 40 best selling in this country? This really is unnerving. I think this week it's number 31. I mean, it's the only sleaze on there. CREEP-SHOW is on there but that's not sleazy. And POLTER-GEIST is on there and that's not sleazy either. We're the only piece of shit on that. I don't understand.

**PH:** It may turn you in to a thousandaire if it keeps going like this.

**PH:** I hope so. It's very unnerving. It really is. It's great, but it's not listed... they have two charts, they have one of these best sells and best rentals, and it's not on the rentals which means more people are buying it than renting it.

**PH:** That's great!

**PH:** Oh, it's great! Media did cartwheels. They're the ones who couldn't understand why... They just released like just another film. And it was going great in stores. They kept calling us saying something is happening out there. Now they're going to put an advertising campaign behind it. They're not going to just take this lying down. I hope.

**PH:** It's nice to see it turning around because it seems that at some point, you know, after Fangoria pushing you, then all of a sudden a lot of these people who were supporting you and giving you good press, turn around and now there's a group of critics who have decided to badmouth you, badmouth your film, and I have a hard time understanding that... Cinefantastique didn't do a real good review and (Bill) Landis and some other people all of a sudden were jumping on the bandwagon. I suppose that's part of fame.

**PH:** That's not even an issue. Did you really think Cinefantastique would have given it a good review?

**PH:** I was hoping they would.

**PH:** The same issue, by the way knocked ROAD WARRIOR for having too much violence. Come on. You know, come on, folks. It's not even... if you even read the stuff you're doing damage to yourself.

**PH:** I was just interested to see other opinions, but it seemed after you reached a certain level of acceptance and the movie was doing fairly well in some pockets, you got a kind of backlash. Although, I have to admit Rex Reed gave you the greatest lines since John Waters.

**PH:** Then even Rex started, not renigging on it, but he gave the real word interview to some Philadelphia paper saying how, well, how they used that quote "The sickest movie I ever saw" without his permission, although, yes, it is the sickest movie he ever saw, and how he wouldn't recommend it to anybody. But, yes, he would recommend it to everybody... and then he claimed that the reason they got the quote, in the first place, was that I ran up him at the Cannes Film Festival and said, "Mr. Reed, what did you think of my film?" And he said, "It's the sickest movie I ever made," and I ran off and used the quote. It's a great story except I never was in France, I've never met Rex Reed. I mean, it's just ridiculous. So, who the hell knows. You can't pay any attention to that.

**PH:** You noted at the end of BASKET CASE you dedicated it to H.G. Lewis. I'm wondering what other directors have influenced you or whom you are interesting.

**PH:** You know, there are lots of individual films. I love CIRCUS OF HORRORS, but what else has the guy done that's as good. So, it's not just... there are just thousands and thousands of individual films I love like THE TINGLER, but Lewis' stuff... he was the only one who was consistently outraging people

in the 60's. This was also done before that dedication was done before Fangoria rediscovered him and started putting him in the spotlight again. In fact, it was before the John Waters' SHOCK VALUE boo came out... we contacted Lewis before the Waters thing which I thought was the first recent interview with Lewis. This is right after he moved down to Florida... and we found him through his mail order advertising place. At the time we got in touch with him he was kind of baffled that anyone even remembered what he used to do for a living.

**PH:** KING OF THE B.S.'s, that book by Todd McCarthy, gave him a certain amount of credence as being an innovator or kind of he is.

**PH:** Definitely, but that was like ten years ago.

**PH:** What about current films, anything you've seen that you find interesting?

**PH:** Sure, I didn't exactly love THE EVIL DEAD, but, God, that's interesting! I just saw it again the other day when I saw MAUSOLEUM and it was playing. I liked DEADLY SPAWN also. I thought I would have liked it if it were a little nastier, but it was good. I loved this scene where the spawn attack a whole bunch of old ladies which had me howling. I would have killed them off. He let them all get away. So, I would have been a little nastier. But, I had a good time at the film. I thought it was real nice.

**PH:** What about the new film? I heard a little bit in Fangoria Ed French is working with you possibly. And it's going to be outrageous.

**PH:** I hope so. I don't know. We're just going through financing this right now and it's a question of how much money we'll get and with a little control. That's always the argument, because the moment they start reading the script, they get into 20 pages of it and start panicking. They say, "Who the hell is going to see this?" I got no babysitters. I don't have a summer camp. I don't have a gay with me. So, I would know what I mean. I would know, it's like, oh, oh, it's not commercial and they start panicking.

**PH:** Do I take that to mean that it might have monsters in it?

**PH:** Oh, it's going to have tons of them. Gees! It's got tons of scary monsters. It's big ones and small ones this time.

**PH:** But you haven't started shooting yet? You're still working on the financing?

**PH:** Sure, sure, we could have done it like BASKET CASE, we could have always raised another budget but that one, no problem and we have done it already. I don't think it's wise if we did another one like that one.

**PH:** Have you found it easier to get backing now? **PH:** That's what we're working for now. With the way things are it's never easy. On the other hand, we've paid off all our investors in BASKET CASE which is already showing a profit. With what it is doing on video tape and everything, there are plenty of people who take notice, but there are also a lot of people who want to control everything you do, and I'm not thrilled about that right now.

**PH:** I hear that you're a baseball fan, is that true or something that Bob Martin mentioned in passing?

**PH:** Well, that was because the series was one, I'm only a baseball fan if it's New York and I just worked out nicely, too, because the last time we were in the series I was typing the script so it was that... I don't know anybody that could not like him.

**PH:** I was wondering because it was interesting to have him talk about stopping over to see you... **PH:** Yeah, that's the first time we met... that night. If you've ever met Bob, he's one of the nicest and likeable people to meet. He's so easy to get along with.

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also his raves for THE EVIL DEAD is totally enthusiastic. And, also, during the summer when we first heard reports about THE EVIL DEAD from the Cannes Film Festival and these people from France were over, he didn't know anything more about it than they did so, it was again, he saw the movie and got enthusiastic, that's the way he works. He's really a genuine fan of the stuff.

**PH:** So have you become enough of a 'thousandaire' now to discontinue your day job?

**PH:** Oh, absolutely not! No way! I was just lucky enough to just buy a VCR finally. Jesus! It's going to be a long time before we'll ever make the money on it. I'm also so busy in debt that even if we make a lot of money, I would have still blown it all.

**PH:** What type of mental everyday kind of work do you do?

**PH:** Oh, God help us. It's an advertising. And that's all I want to say because it is so humiliating. Actually, to be involved in the advertising world...

STRAUB 'N STREIBER — continued from page 3

and an inbuilt dramatic consciousness. He's also a neat collaborator and very tactful," Straub added with a smile.

When THE TALISMENTINE goes on sale next year, Straub promises, "Nobody will be able to tell who wrote what. Our wives can't tell, our editors can't tell, and we won't tell."

Donald Farmer

#### WHITLEY STREIBER

Since my favorite kinds of movies are horror films and art films, I STANDS to reason that my favorite so far this year is THE HUNGER, adapted from the novel by Whitley Streiber. Even though the film deleted some of Streiber's most vivid sequences (like villagers roasting vampires grins on a spit), it's still hard to resist a movie that serves up world-class stars like Catherine Deneuve and David Bowie as vampires and Oscar nominee Susan Sarandon as Deneuve's romantic interest.

I caught up with Streiber in Nashville last May at the Kubla Khan convention on the same weekend that THE HUNGER was opening in town, and he was obviously excited about director Tony Scott's adaptation of his novel. "It's a trip and a half," Streiber told me after concluding a panel discussion. "I had a lot of faith in him (Scott), and he's a genius. He got taste a lot of feel for people."

Although THE HUNGER was released with an R rating, Streiber was openly in debt, and he was obviously submitted to the Ratings Board "because of the very beautiful love scene between Catherine Deneuve and Susan Sarandon. Freddie Fields (President of MGM) said (to the Ratings Board), 'If you don't let us use his scene, we will shelve the picture. We would rather lose a \$15 million loss than lose this scene.'" Streiber said the Board rejected THE HUNGER received its R rating without sacrificing a frame of footage.

Aside from his praise for Scott's direction, Streiber was also enthusiastic about Dick Smith's make-up which involved aging David Bowie and creating several zombie-like creatures which attack Deneuve. "It's the best he's done," Streiber said. "It's beyond craft."

Reflecting on the 1981 film version of his first novel WOLFEN, Streiber said he was "fairly happy" with the finished product, but said the decision to release it so close to the release dates of THE HOWLING and AMERICAN WEREWOLF IN LONDON "hurt all three."

Streiber said he first turned to writing because "I realized at a certain point in my life I was an unusually impatient person. I think this was a mistake. I began to write because there wasn't much else to do." His first break came at 14 when a poem he'd submitted was published in Atlantic Monthly, but Streiber added, "It was 11 years later before I published another word."

He admits that some of his early work was "almost dull beyond human belief, but I eventually almost backed out becoming a good horror novelist by some dogs that attacked me one night in Central Park. I thought, this is ridiculous. I'm in New York, I'm in Central Park, and I've got to climb a tree. And that was the basis for WOLFEN." Nowadays, Streiber says he's only motivated to write something "if it comes from an idea that really scares me. Otherwise, it's a waste of time."

He may not use it as a basis of his next novel, but Streiber says he's planning to write a novel on the experience occurred a few years ago "when my agent and my editor were lovers. There's something about calling your agent at 10 at night and having your editor answer the phone. She wasn't the only one who was getting screwed."

Donald Farmer



A random head from CURTAINS.

LEWIS - continued from page 5

they leave the earth and move in the planet called California, but I suspect he's still a very decent guy.

DF: When you started making the gore movies, who do you think was the most expensive star you ever hired? Was Henry Youngman...

HGL: Henry Youngman was not expensive. Henry Youngman was 'available.' We shot his whole segment in one day. That was the only requirement — that it be on a Sunday. In fact, the day was named, and he was available for 34 hours that day, but that was it... when the clock struck 12 he turned into a pumpkin and disappeared.

DF: I guess he was the biggest name in any of the gore movies.

HGL: I've never had a particular reverence for names. I said to Henry Youngman when we were shooting, "We're going to have to have your words with English subtitles because you talk so fast." It was almost impossible to understand him. The big problem working with him was to get him to slow down enough so people could make out the words. Everybody had his own set of problems. The availability of star names or lack of availability of star names has nothing to do with a gore film. I understand the difference between the \$250,000 and the \$400,000 budget of BLOOD FEAST! It would pertain to whether or not they get semi-names to act in it. It may make some sense for cable. It doesn't make any sense at all for theatres or for video tape because goreheads go to see the effects.

DF: Is BLOOD FEAST where the advertising said, "Starring Playboy's favorite playmate — Connie Mason" — did that make any difference...

HGL: Now, that was Dave Friedman. Dave and I were partners and I let wanted Connie Mason in the picture, I put Connie Mason in the picture.

**WARNING**

BECAUSE OF THE INTENSE NATURE OF THIS FILM, STOMACH DISTRESS MAY OCCUR.

**WATER BAG**

FOR USE WHEN VIEWING THE SCREAMING STOPS

DO NOT RE-USE

DF: Did her being fresh from Playboy drive up her price? HGL: Connie Mason was not fresh from anything! No, she got the same pay everybody got — we operated on a Democratic principle. We also fought inflation where we could — especially with actors' salaries.

DF: A couple of years ago Playboy had some article about a Playmate reunion and they had a picture of what she looks like now.

HGL: Oh, what does she look like now?

DF: She's held up pretty well.

HGL: Oh, that's good.

DF: I guess one last question would be — if you had an unlimited budget, do you ever have any ideas for a dream project?

HGL: Well, the film I've never made and I still have the script for is called GALAXY GIRLS. Remember a film Woody Allen made a few years ago before he went absolutely crazy...

DF: SLEEPER.

HGL: It was... SLEEPER, that's the film. And I've had that script for eight or nine years now.

DF: I first heard you mention it in the Monster Times interview with Randy Palmer.

HGL: Well, I'll be damned. In fact, Randy Palmer read that script, as I remember.

DF: Do you still have the script?

HGL: Somewhere.

DF: Was it about girls who are like sausages?

HGL: Well, the girls come from a planet where the men look the sausages, and love is their food, and it's done with high good humor, but requires a certain amount of effects. It's the kind of picture you could make cheap or you could make it expensive. If I had the budget I would make it expensive. I think that safety lies in a medium budget gore film — I don't think it's possible to have a loser there. I personally (like) country and western. Like MOONSHINE MOUNTAIN and THIS STUFF'LL KILL YOU — films like that are full of rotting music.

DF: That's more your personal taste.

HGL: Yes, I can't superimpose my personal tastes on films where there are investors' dollars, and they don't put their money in a film to satisfy the producer's ego. That happens too often — a producer puts his girlfriend in it, puts his own personal likes or dislikes in it — shoots in Swedish or — I don't know what he does — I can't see doing that. I think if you're going to indulge yourself in the film medium, which is a very expensive medium — it's not like writing a book where it's all sitting at the typewriter or the word processor and you can do it with your own money with the expectation that that money will disappear. So what I would do is simply have better effects. They've come a long way since we went down and tried to manufacture some stage blood. If you did make one of these two movies that are in the talking stages — do you think you'd be challenged to come up with effects that could top the movies that are out now?

HGL: I don't think so, because ours was intensive, not extensive. What's happened is that producers are going to 'extensive' effects. If you look at RETURN OF THE JEDI — that is basically a very expensive Walt Disney movie. I know that George Lucas made it, and that Walt Disney made TRON, which is a good Walt Disney movie, but that's what it is. The effects are extensive. Our effects were and will be, I guess, if we make another — intensive. For an audience, seeing a row of people wiped out has no emotional impact because it's a row of people and therefore there's no identification. But to see one person literally dismembered or to have an eye or a tongue pulled out or to have the whole chest ripped to pieces — that's the kind of effect that's perfect for a low budget film.

DF: And it had more of an emotional impact.

HGL: Oh yes. Visualize the thumb scene in TWO THOUSAND MANIACS. I've seen people literally go bananas over that scene.

DF: And even after that they chop her arm off...

HGL: Well, that was not as well done because we couldn't get a limber arm.

DF: Did you usually use department store mannequin limbs with gore at the end of them?

HGL: That's all we did. It's the result of the budgets we had. You asked what we would do if we had more money — we would improve on that. I would have better effects — that's what the audiences are looking for — that is — the audiences who go to see our films. I don't speak for anybody but me. I can't see devoting two years to making a STAR WARS or RETURN OF THE JEDI — it's just not my kind of thing. Why should I? Whatever the rewards might be for that, they wouldn't justify taking two years where I couldn't play tennis twice a day.

DF: You're already able to work full time doing the mail order...

HGL: Yes, I work with and as I please, and you can't do

that in the film business.

DF: When you're shooting, you have to be there every day.

HGL: You shoot all day and rehearse all night and you look at the rushes and say, "Oh, my God!" But, as I say, I'd like to make just one more — especially under the conditions that now exist.

DF: Your name's even more popular now than it was when you were making the movies.

HGL: Far more, far more! When I was making movies I was just some smuck with a camera.

DF: Now you're sort of like a cult hero.

HGL: I'm a cult hero. Yes, I am like the late James Dean or Busby Berkeley... the Busby Berkeley of gore! A lot of people think I'm dead — it's astounding.

DF: There must be 10 or 15 books out now that mention you. HGL: Where were they when I was making films? I think it's funny. It really is the cream of the jest that long after the fact I am redisccovered. Yes, I claim a peculiar position in the world of motion picture history in that I introduced a type of effect that had not been dared before. But it's a curio — it's nothing that's worthy of anthologizing. It's like the fellow who jumps off a 14 story building and lands on a four-inch square sponge. He's a curio — a footnote to history!

## REVIEWS — continued from page 2

don't even have to wait to see if it hits your town, 'cause it's already been released on videotape.

Next up on the video screen was BLOOD WATER OF DR. Z. I couldn't make out the copywrite date on the titles, but I assume DR. Z is fairly recent since it's almost a carbon copy of SWAMP THING — but without Wes Craven's directing, Louis Jordan's villainy, or Adrienne Barbeau's books. The Dr. Z of the title is actually called Dr. Leopold (or something like that) and he's a wimpy little scientist who turns himself into a half-man/half-fish monster that spends the rest of the movie lurking through swamps and strangling rural scientists.

The credits informed me that Dr. Z was produced and directed by Ron Baranoff, and the most makes one suspect that AIP TV's Larry Buchanan is back in business. Next to the SWAMP THING similarities, Dr. Z. looks almost like a retreat of Buchanan's CURSE OF THE SWAMP CREATURE, right down its ridiculous monster suit, total absence of heavy violence or nudity, and deadend plot narrative. Coming right after MAD MAX: MASSacre, it was especially exasperating to see a movie where the murder scenes amount to people getting choked and falling over.

Since everything about Dr. Z. is so inept, it makes me suspect the director thought his monster suit would carry the show. Nothing could be further from the truth, though, since the costume in question looks more like a giant anteater than a fishman — even if it doesn't resort to gulf-balls for eyes as a Buchanan.

It was almost 11:30 p.m. before FRANKENSTEIN ISLAND got underway, and I was thinking that nothing — absolutely nothing — could be worse than BLOOD WATERS OF DR. Z.

I was wrong.

FRANKENSTEIN ISLAND is a brand new effort starring John Carradine and Cameron Mitchell, and the promise of these kings of schlock horror together had me pretty excited during the opening titles. The feeling was short-lived, though, as FRANKENSTEIN ISLAND quickly revealed itself to be a thoroughly juvenile premise in the 'kiddie matinee' mold of the 60's — with even 'less' violence than DR. Z. (not an easy task considering that ON GOLDEN POND was more horrifying than DR. Z.)

I'd had high hopes that Carradine would continue his recent trend of quality genre pictures like THE MONSTER CLUB, THE HOWLING, and HOUSE OF LONG SHADOWS, so his participation in FRANKENSTEIN ISLAND is all the more disappointing since it's more comparable to his HORROR OF THE BLOOD MONSTERS or WIZARD OF MARIS — and without a shred of the redeeming camp appeal that salvaged BILL Y THE KID MEETS DRACULA or ASTRO ZOMBIES.

The opening scene recalls THE MYSTERIOUS ISLAND as some balloon travelers are deposited on the beach of an exotic island and promptly set off exploring. They meet up with a bunch of animal-skinned jungle girls from a tribe the girls' guided by the spirit of Dr. Frankenstein (Carradine), who is in a coma, and brain is being kept alive by his great grand daughter Sheila Frankenstein (I swear that's her name).

Sheila is involved in research to save her ailing "genius" husband, Dr. Von Reising, while Cameron Mitchell is a poetry spouting mental patient who talks about his "lost



Lenore" (shades of Poe) and is later revealed to be the father of one of the friendly jungle girls.

Since Dr. Frankenstein is supposed to be dead from the outset, Carradine's appearances are always in the form of see-through apparitions which are superimposed over various scenes — a clever budgetary device which meant his entire role could have been filmed in one afternoon with his presence never being necessary on location.

We're told that the Frankenstein monster has been chained up in a cavern on the island, and he naturally gets free in time for about 10 minutes of mayhem at the climax. The monster's make-up is strictly a red suit and flat head, and the actor waves his arms around like he's seen GHOST OF FRANKENSTEIN one time too many.

In this gore-saturated age, it's kind of hard to conceive how a picture like FRANKENSTEIN ISLAND ever got off the ground — how some producers think that an audience still exists for a shockingly mad monster pic that's devoid of the slightest hint of violence, sex, or almost any commercial angle except the Frankenstein name value (which won't be worth much with a few more movies like this!).

Maybe those European markets are more desperate for product than I thought — at least they'd better be for this picture's sake. After all, I'd say it's hard to make a good profit when one of your "first run" engagements is third spot on a quadruple bill.

For those still awake in the Skyway lot, I imagine that HATCHET MURDERS must have come as quite a shock. I mean, after three poverty-row pics in a row, here was a beautifully stylized horror/mystery with a troubling score by Argento's Goblin band, stand-out camera work, and, imaginative, alluring violence in the best Mario Bava tradition (with great effects from Carlo Rambaldi in his pre-E.T. days).

Since I have HATCHET MURDERS on video tape, I didn't stick around till the end (also because the projectionist wouldn't wake up and get the picture back in frame. At 1 a.m. he was obviously beyond caring).

I only wish they'd done HATCHET MURDERS first or second, and saved DR. Z and FRANKENSTEIN ISLAND for the midnight shift. Falling asleep through either of those would've been no great loss.

Donald Farmer

#### JAWS 3-D

(Universal) I'm not going to devote a lot of space to this one since I'm sure all the major mags will tell more than you'd ever want to know about it. Just let me say that, while JAWS 3-D ranks way below the first and slightly above the second one storywise and has the murkiest photography of all three (something that seems to be a handicap of most 3-D movies), I'd still recommend it for offering up a number of striking shots that combine 3-D and go to the best advantage since PARASITE and FRIDAY

#### THE LETH. PART THREE.

I think I'd actually be willing to suffer through the dreary plot development all over again just for a second look at the severed arm that seems to flow over your head and the great final shot of the shark exploding in 3-D — with various body pieces flying out of the screen.

#### THE GATES OF HELL.

(Molloy Picture Marketing) Still playing at grindhouses and drive-ins across the country, THE GATES OF HELL is a mind-boggling Italian import that makes THE LETH. DEAD look like Walt Disney. Seventeen-generational Lucio Fulci (20th-GENIE) pulled out all the stops this time in presenting a relentless orgy of brain rattlers, eyeball poppers, and entrail vomitings in this confection of the supernatural.

The diabolized priest has to do with an evil, suicidal priest who returns from the grave to lead an army of zombies into battle against a psychic, blind bimbo in a kind of graveyard Armageddon. Nuff said. It is gut-wrenching gore, not a cohesive plot, that makes A PULCI movie tick. (This is a point that critics have been lost on all the other, more-explicitly sexual periodicals that have reviewed this movie.)

Heading the list of atrocities in GATES is a scene that actually made this reviewer observe of the film's "chuckle critics, and forced about a dozen members of the predominantly teenaged audience in the theatre where I saw the film to retreat to the 'safety' of the lobby. The "chuckle critics" are "parking" near a graveyard (how convenient) when they are set upon by the evil priest, a super-Svenalgi who evicts the young lady into first spitting out her tongue, then tearing out her lungs, heart, stomach, and intestines. A single bass guitar and a drum provide the only background music during this seemingly endless sequence, thumping away slowly and seductively, almost erotically, as if accompanying a striptease act. An Internal striptease!

Brains are torn from crushed skulls at the rate of one every 35 minutes in GATES, an effect that admittedly becomes rather tedious and phony looking after the third or fourth victim is dispatched in this manner. These are the only gore effects in the movie that are not stunningly realistic.

Fulci is known primarily as a gore director and is not usually given credit for his ability to create suspense. But in a subplot that takes place in the "evil priest's" mod, Fulci manages to produce an almost unbearable tension by threatening to show us an infinitely more ghastly horror than the one he actually delivers.

The scene takes place in a basement garage. A deranged father bears his teenage daughter's love in the basement and races downstairs to find her in the back seat of the family car with the vicious doctor. Mistakenly suspecting

hanky panky, the father drags the young man over to a latrine and, in a scene reminiscent of silent movie cliffhangers, starts to push his head — face first — towards the spinning steel drill. The camera continues to cut from the ever-closing drill to the screaming man's eye. At this point our minds are ready to crack as we wait for the inevitable goggling mental horror to strike that naked eye. Then, at the very moment when the entire audience is ready to stare, the screenplay shifts its head, and "only" gets an ear-to-ear drilling. A drill that splits the blood and chewed up bond is at slowly rises through a man's head doesn't exactly make a good cover for Family Circle, but compared to what could have been it's almost a relief.

But the seriously disturbed needn't worry: this is the only example of comparative restraint in THE GATES OF HELL, and even the most insatiable gore glutton will have to bring a "dangle-bag" for the leftovers.

Robert Berlia

#### WHEN THE SCREAMING STOPS

(Independent Artists/CC Astro Pro Film. 1973 — 1980 U.S. Color, 94 min. Directed by Amanda De Oro)

I love a good campaign — they're part of what make exploitation movies great. But with a few exceptions (like BLOODSUCKING FREAKS), it seems that the better the ad campaign, the worse the movie. WHEN THE SCREAMING STOPS is a perfect example of this.

WHEN THE SCREAMING STOPS' ad campaign consisted of radio spots beginning a week ahead of the first midnight showing (it only stayed in N.Y. one weekend). The ads said, "If you have a weak stomach, don't come," and "Vomit bags will be issued at the door due to the insatiable nature of this film."

Well, this was enough for me. I knew I had to see the film. It seemed like they played these radio spots every hour.

I've experienced enough of these midnight specials to not let my expectations get too high, but I didn't expect the boring, imported bodge-podge I saw. It wasn't even funny/boring. The ineptitude of the acting was enormous, but not the enjoyable off-center "ham" acting in films by T.J. Lewis, Ed Wood, or R.G. Lewis. The violence was strictly bargain basement-type bloodshed, manquinia disfigurement. It was like the film inserts were added to lighten the violence, but these were so obvious and amateurish, they had the

#### audience booing.

The plot was an incoherent mess. It centers around a girls' school where, of course, they only wear bathing suits or flimsy negligees. There are a number of mysterious and brutal murders which leave the town people terrified, fearing the curse of the Lethel. The head of the girls' school decides to hire an Italian "stunt" big game hunter who likes to act arrogant and has pants that look sprayed on.

The hunter then goes to the ocean to relax, and runs into a sea nymph, who we later find is the Lethel.

Lethel, the monster killer has a costume that looks like something done by Paul Blaisdell when he's drunk, and has a budget of \$300.

The remainder of the plot gets somewhat fuzzy, probably due to my terminal boredom and gigantic plot holes. The hunter finds out the Lethel is the monster, and the Lethel wants to keep the hunter as her slave-made. Eventually the hunter finds the hiding place of the Lethel and kills it.

I can't recommend the movie, and hope its next stop is in the graveyard of obscure movies, but, I have to say, it did have a great ad campaign.

Pat Hollis

#### FRIGHTMARE

This is one about a horror star named Camm Rappoff (Ferdinand Mayne of VAMPIRE LOVES and FEARLESS VAMPIRE KILLERS). He arranges for his soul to be contacted after his death. Once he's been entombed in his multimillion-dollar mausoleum, Rappoff's body is stolen by a group of doctors from the Horror Film Society. They bring his corpse home and Rappoff is resurrected through occult means, then he embarks on a mission of revenge with burning bodies, a decapitation, and a tongue that's bitten off.

Unfortunately, the murders are done in more of a PG style than the R rating suggests. This film would be called THE

HORROR STAR, and they should have kept the original title — at least it tells the story. If I see one more movie like this, I'll go crazy and think those old horror beach blanket films are classics!

Ernest Habert

To stick in my own two cents worth, I caught FRIGHTMARE last night (July 29) on a double bill with MEATCLEAVE MASSACRE and thought the whole style of the film was reminiscent of some of the great early 70's genre films like DR. PHIBBS and DRACULA A.D. 1973.

Though FRIGHTMARE doesn't pile on the "camp" element as heavily as DR. PHIBBS, it proceeds with just enough tongue in cheek humor (and with an emphasis on atmosphere and top production values) to make me nostalgic for the Hammer/AIP/American boom of a decade ago. The violence never goes beyond the early 70's level, either, but — in the case of this film — I'm glad. Too much gore would have been "out of taste" against the grain for the type of film.

D.F.

DON'T GO IN THE WOODS (BIF Films) I shot a whole afternoon going to Nashville to see this thing, so writing this review just brings back bad memories. Variety says this was really made in 1960, and they aptly described it as the worst effort from that horror boom period.

There's really no need to condemn the plot since the book says it all. There's this tacky woods maniac who kills off campers and... oh, excuse me, say you've heard this before?

Well, BIF has plenty of blood, but no interesting gore or make-up effects. And considering the girls in this movie, the absence of nudity is a plus. Another reason to stay away is the constant "canned" camera work anyone sitting too close to the screen could probably get motion sickness watching that!

D.F.

## Children of the Night

Coming for late 1983, CHILDREN OF THE NIGHT No. 4. It's back after six years because you demanded it. CHILDREN is a fan magazine dedicated to fantasy, science fiction and horror movies. Issue no. 4 looks at many of the major films of 1983. Scheduled are views and reviews of: SUPERMAN PART II, THE JERK (including a hilarious celebrity comments) PSYCHO 2, KRULL, JAWS 3-D, OCTOPUSSY, and several others. CHILDREN is a quality fanzine, 48 pages, on expensive glossy paper stock, for fine reproduction. Order now. Sent \$2.95 plus \$1.25 for first class delivery (a total of \$4.20 per copy. Please make checks to Derek Jensen) for Children of the Night, Dept. S.T., 7400 Village Drive, Prairie Village, Kansas 66208.



At the top are two choice shots from New Line's **THE EVIL DEAD**, which Frank (BASKET CASE) Henenlotter comments on in this issue. The other photos are from MPM's wonderfully sleazy **MAUSOLEUM**, which is still in national release and recently became available on videotape. A review appears in *Splatter Times* no. 1, which is still available for \$2 from P.O. Box 7733, Cookeville, TN 38502.

